

R E M A R K S

Reconsideration of this application is respectfully requested.

Claims 16-28 were rejected under 35 USC 102 as being anticipated by previously cited "Kobayashi et al" (USP 6,772,029, US 2002/0192055 and WO 01/54187), and claims 29-35 were rejected under 35 USC 103 as being obvious in view of the combination of Kobayashi et al and newly cited "Kimura et al" (USP 6,161,696). These rejections, however, are respectfully traversed.

On page 2 of the Office Action, the Examiner asserts that "Kobayashi et al teach processing tanks, a transporting track, transporting device, a scheduler, buffer stages, drying devices, load-unloading units, cassettes. The transporting devices are operated as claimed." Moreover, on page 4 of the Office Action, the Examiner asserts that "[i]n contrast to the applicants [sic] arguments the transporting devices operate at ranges as claimed. The claims only prohibit placing the transporting device at the same tank together with another transporting device at the same time."

It is respectfully pointed out, however, that the Examiner's characterization of the claims is incorrect.

According to independent claim 16, the plurality of substrate transporting devices comprise a first substrate transporting device which is operable in a first operating range

that extends at least from a first one of the processing tanks to a last one of the processing tanks and a second substrate transporting device which is operable in a second operating range that extends at least from the first one of the processing tanks to the last one of the processing tanks.

That is, according to claim 16, both a first substrate transporting device and a second substrate transporting device have respective operating ranges that include all of the plurality of processing tanks for processing the substrates.

Kobayashi et al does not disclose, teach or suggest this feature of the present invention. In fact, according to Kobayashi et al, each transfer device has an operating range that only overlaps with the operating range of the adjacent transfer device at a temporary stage (3a, 3b). This can clearly be understood from Fig. 1 and paragraphs [0059] and [0060] of Kobayashi et al (US 2002/0192055). For example, according to Kobayashi et al, the transfer device 1a does not move to the chemical cleaning device 6a or the plating tank 9a since the cleaning device 6a is placed only in the range of movement of the transfer device 1b and the plating tank 9a is placed only in the range of movement of the transfer device 1c. Accordingly, it is respectfully submitted that Kobayashi et al represents the same concept in this respect as the prior art described in the Background section of the present application.

Thus, Kobayashi et al does not disclose substrate transporting devices having operating ranges each extending at least from a first one to a last one of a plurality of processing tanks as according to the present invention as recited in claim 16.

In addition, it is respectfully submitted that since Kobayashi et al does not disclose operating ranges for at least first and second substrate transporting devices as recited in claim 16, Kobayashi et al does not disclose that the first substrate transporting device and the second substrate transporting device are provided on the same transporting track such that when the second substrate transporting device is positioned at an n^{th} one of the processing tanks the first substrate transporting device is movable only up to an $n-1^{\text{th}}$ one of the processing tanks which immediately precedes the n^{th} one of the processing tanks. In other words, the first and second substrate transporting devices are movable anywhere as long as they do not contact each other on the same transporting track.

Still further, since Kobayashi et al does not disclose any of the structure of the present invention described above, Kobayashi et al also cannot disclose, teach or suggest a scheduler as recited in claim 16, which prepares scheduling data for controlling operations of the plurality of substrate transporting devices, based on processing conditions and

transporting conditions which are entered in advance, wherein when the scheduling data indicates that transportation of the substrates occurs at more than one of the processing tanks simultaneously, the scheduler checks whether it is possible for the transportation of the substrates at said more than one of the processing tanks to be shared among the plurality of substrate transporting devices; and wherein when it is possible for the transportation of the substrates to be shared the scheduling data prepared by the scheduler is confirmed and the operations of the plurality of substrate transporting devices are controlled based on the scheduling data, and when it is not possible for the transportation of the substrates to be shared a timing of loading substrates before processing at the processing tanks is changed.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully submitted that independent claim 16 clearly recites structural features that are not disclosed, taught or suggested by Kobayashi et al, and it is respectfully submitted that claim 16, and claims 17-35 depending therefrom, all clearly patentably distinguish over Kobayashi et al singly or taken in combination with any of the other prior art of record under 35 USC 102 as well as under 35 USC 103.

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Allowance of the claims and the passing of this application to issue are respectfully solicited.

Application Serial No. 10/688,342
Response to Final Rejection

Customer No. 01933

If the Examiner has any comments, questions, objections or recommendations, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the telephone number given below for prompt action.

Respectfully submitted,

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